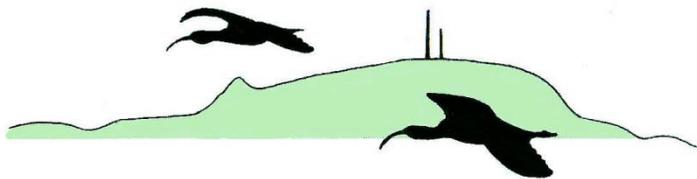


ORANGE FIELD NATURALIST AND CONSERVATION SOCIETY Inc



PO Box 369
Orange NSW 2800
orangefieldnats@gmail.com
10 August 2015

Scott Maunder, Orange City Council
Daniel Mees, GHD

Response to Mt Canobolas and Environs Mountain Bike Trail
Constraints and Opportunities Discussion Paper July 2015

Dear Sirs,

The recommendation of the discussion paper is:

that a mountain bike trail designer is engaged to design a trail network, giving consideration to the constraints and opportunities identified within this report.

The Society, an identified stakeholder group, cannot support this being the next step.

The mountain bike trail for Orange proposal should have started with the appraisal of a number of alternative and suitable places close to Orange, rather than just the Mt Canobolas SCA.

However as the discussion paper is about Mt Canobolas specifically rather than a mountain bike trail for Orange generally, we consider the next step is to complete a full and thorough environmental assessment to determine what areas could be suitable for bike trail use.

To find a suitable area within the SCA would be difficult as Hunter (2002) says:

Mt Canobolas SCA is a significant isolated high altitude conservation reserve with comparatively little disturbed habitat. It conserves some of the major and widespread communities found within the South East Highland Bioregion and the vegetation associated with high altitude basaltic soils. Many of the associated communities and species are at the north-western limit of the known distribution: some highly significant.

OFNCS response continued

Mt Canobolas is valued for many reasons. Its principal value is being an isolated environmental and botanic island amongst a fragmented landscape that has little remnant native vegetation. The fragmentation is due to historical agricultural clearing and the planting of commercial pine plantations.

Placing any trail network on the Mt Canobolas CSA, which only is 6km X 5km, would have to involve a 'snakes and ladders' arrangement, a great number of switchbacks and then be concentrated in a few areas if the bike trails had to avoid existing walking trails and roadways.

The mountain already has roads, walking trails, fire trails, picnic areas, lookout spots and communications towers and related buildings. Creating bike trails would only further break up the vegetative continuity of the mountains, create access to new areas, provide new access to unwanted users like motorbike riders, provide the possibility for increased soil erosion and facilitate the introduction of more weeds to newly disturbed and visited locations.

Whilst the paper discusses a single track trail, any trail would have to be much wider than this to accommodate passing, access for emergency or maintenance vehicles and waiting points so the cyclists can stop and smell the leaves or take in the view.

This last point is stated as the main reason to use the SCA for the trails. It is 'prettier' than going through open paddocks, already disturbed woodland or pine forests. There is little intersection between the groups that ride mountain bikes, birdwatchers or those that appreciate the botanic (outside of a garden) side of life.

Locally, Orange mountain bikers have had to use the well credentialed Kinross State Forest. The Bathurst bike track is a small loop placed on an open hillside. The new Geurie bike tracks appear to be a great series of switchbacks through scattered woodland. All of these tracks are much shorter than any number that has been discussed for the Mt Canobolas proposal.

So why is a new lengthy, mountain bike trail network needed for Mt Canobolas?

If a new track is needed to bring visitors to Orange why aren't other places around the city being considered as an option?

The premise of employing the designer (as said at the 23rd July meeting) is to establish the location and size of the potential trail network. The initially discussed single track 70 kilometre trail doesn't appear to be dead although the main pillar of hosting large scale events is no longer an important consideration.

So who are the end-users for this proposed network of mountain bike trails? If it is not to be used for large scale competitive events this leaves the individual mountain bike rider who visits Orange. This bike

OFNCS response continued

rider has either come specifically to ride Mt Canobolas or it is one of the destination features that enticed them to visit Orange. What economic return is there to Orange by just riding Mt Canobolas?

I'll leave the detailed economic argument to others but it would appear the economic benefits to Orange would be swamped by the construction, maintenance and environmental costs of building a mountain bike trail network on the Mt Canobolas SCA.

One reason for considering Mt Canobolas is that currently used (for riding) pine forests will be harvested or changed over the next 40 years. This wouldn't allow continued access for any trails. The relative costs of remediating any disturbance to trails by forestry operators would be minor compared to developing anything on Mt Canobolas.

The comparative use of Rotorua and Mt Stromolo is false as their situations can't be used to support the Mt Canobolas/Orange argument.

Rotorua has a great many things that bring tourists there. Mountain bike riding would be well down any list of reasons to visit and anyway the trails are through plantation forests, some well outside of town.

Mt Stromlo is just outside the bike-riding inclined city of Canberra. Canberra has a population of 380,000 people and Mt Stromlo is 20 minutes from Parliament House.

The Society does not support the Mt Canobolas mountain bike trail network because its construction would be to the environmental detriment of the Mt Canobolas SCA.

This proposal is well outside the SCA's management plan, it is not welcomed by NPWS which it appears would be left with the on-going maintenance load and would facilitate the deterioration of the very physical qualities that make Mt Canobolas such an environmental stand-out.

If there is to be a next step for the Mt Canobolas discussion it has to be a full environmental study of the SCA, over at least a full year (four seasons) not just a snapshot.

Really any discussion of a mountains bike trails network for Orange should consider alternative locations, other than the Mt Canobolas SCA.

Regards,

John Austin, President OFNCS